

Message Text

SECRET

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ACTION SS-25

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC NIACT IMMEDIATE 8398
AMEMBASSY AMMAN NIACT IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY BEIRUT NIACT IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS NIACT IMMEDIATE

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 TEL AVIV 7195

EXDIS TREAT AS NODIS

WHITE HOUSE FOR DR. BRZEKINSKI ONLY

E.O.11652: GDS
TAGS: PBOR, MOPS, MILI, LE, US, IS, PLO
SUBJ: SOUTH LEBANON: PRESIDENTIAL MESSAGE

REF: STATE 230417

SUMMARY: I SAW BEGIN AT 1000 SEPTEMBER 24 AND DELIVERED THE PRESIDENT'S LETTER. THE PRIME MINISTER READ IT CAREFULLY AND, AS I HAD ANTICIPATED, SAID HE WOULD HAVE TO CONSULT HIS CABINET COLLEAGUES BEFORE GIVING A DEFINITE RESPONSE. HE REVIEWED THE IMPORTANCE OF THE CEASEFIRE PRECEDING OR FOLLOWING CLOSELY THE WITHDRAWAL OF ISRAELI FORCES IN ORDER TO MINIMIZE THE RISK TO THE CHRISTIANS AND THE LIKELIHOOD OF FURTHER ATTACKS ON ISRAELI TOWNS IN THE NORTH. HE ARGUED THAT ISRAELI ACTIONS HAVE BEEN ENTIRELY DEFENSIVE AND THEREFORE NO GROUNDS EXIST FOR FINDING ISRAEL HAS VIOLATED THE TERMS OF ANY AGREEMENT REGARDING THE USE OF U.S.-SUPPLIED WEAPONS. I PUSHED HIM VERY HARD ON THE NEED FOR URGENT WITHDRAWAL OF ISRAELI FORCES FROM LEBANON AND
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HE FINALLY AGREED TO CONVOKE A MEETING TONIGHT OF THE MINISTERIAL SECURITY COMMITTEE. HE ASKED THAT THE PRESIDENT BE INFORMED OF HIS INTERIM REPLY THAT ISRAEL AGREES TO WITHDRAW ITS FORCES, THE TIMING TO BE DECIDED AT TONIGHTS'S CABINET MEETING. END SUMMARY.

1. I MET WITH BEGIN AT THE PRIME MINISTER'S RESIDENCE

IN JERUSALEM AT 1000 HOURS ON SEPTEMBER 24. HE WAS ALONE. I SAID THE PRESIDENT UNDERSTOOD THE IMPORTANCE OF THE SABBATH TO THE PRIME MINISTER AND IT WAS ONLY BECAUSE OF THE URGENCY OF MY MESSAGE THAT I HAD BEEN INSTRUCTED TO SEE HIM THIS MORNING. I THEN HANDED HIM THE PRESIDENT'S LETTER.

2. BEGIN READ THE LETTER CAREFULLY AND SAID HE WANTED TO THANK THE PRESIDENT FOR COMMUNICATING WITH HIM DIRECTLY ON SUCH AN IMPORTANT SUBJECT. HE SAID HE WOULD HAVE TO CONSULT WITH HIS COLLEAGUES BEFORE GIVING A DEFINITE RESPONSE AND THIS WOULD BE DELAYED BECAUSE OF THE SABBATH. HE REMINDED ME THAT SOME MEMBERS OF THE CABINET WOULD NOT EVEN TALK ON THE TELEPHONE ON THE SABBATH. THERE WILL BE A CABINET MEETING TOMORROW AT 1000 AND HE WOULD PERHAPS CONVENE A MEETING OF THE SECURITY COMMITTEE AT 0900. HE THEN REVIEWED FAMILIAR ISRAELI ARGUEMENTS ABOUT THE COMMITMENT TO THE OUTNUMBERED AND OUTGUNNED CHRISTIANS AND ADDED THAT RECENT ROCKET ATTACKS ON ISRAELI TOWNS CONFIRM THE CORRECTNESS OF THE ISRAELI OPPOSITION TO PLO FORCES ON ISRAELI BORDERS. ISRAEL MUST, THEREFORE, CONTINUE TO STRESS THE IMPORTANCE OF THE QUESTION OF THE TIMING BETWEEN ANY ISRAELI WITHDRAWAL AND THE COMING INTO FORCE OF A CEASEFIRE. A WITHDRAWAL CANNOT BE USED BY THE PLO TO ATTACK CHRISTIAN FORCES OR TO RESUME ROCKET ATTACKS AGAINST ISRAEL.

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3. I REPLIED THAT THE ROCKET ATTACK COULD BE SEEN AS RETALIATION FOR WHAT THE PALESTINIANS PERCEIVE TO BE THE PROVOCATION OF ISRAELI FORCES IN LEBANON. IN ANY CASE, THE GOL MAINTAINS THAT ISRAELI FORCES MUST BE WITHDRAWN PRIOR TO ANY CEASEFIRE; IT CANNOT PERSUADE THE PALESTINIANS TO HOLD THEIR FIRE WHILE ISRAELI FORCES ARE IN LEBANON. THE CENTRAL POINT EMERGING FROM OUR DISCUSSIONS WITH THE GOL IS THAT THE FIRST STEP MUST BE THE PROMPT AND COMPLETE WITHDRAWAL OF ISRAELI FORCES.

4. BEGIN SAID HE UNDERSTOOD THAT FROM THE PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE BUT HE REMAINED CONCERNED ABOUT HOW TO BE RESPONSIVE TO THE PRESIDENT BECAUSE OF THE SABBATH AND HIS INABILITY TO DECIDE THE ISSUE WITHOUT TALKING TO HIS CABINET COLLEAGUES. I SAID AGAIN THAT THE USG BELIEVES THAT THE SOONER ISRAELI FORCES ARE WITHDRAWN, THE GREATER THE CHANCES ARE THAT THE ROCKET ATTACKS WILL CEASE AND THE BETTER THE CHANCES ARE THAT THE LEBANESE CAN RESTRAIN THE PALESTINIANS. I REPEATED THAT HE MUST UNDERSTAND THERE CAN BE NO CEASEFIRE UNTIL ISRAELI FORCES ARE TOTALLY WITHDRAWN AND THAT THE

LONGER THEY REMAIN IN LEBANON, THE GREATER THE RISK OF ESCALATION. I SAID I HAD CLEARLY UNDERSTOOD FROM WEIZMAN LAST NIGHT THAT ONLY THE PRIME MINISTER HAD THE AUTHORITY TO MODIFY THE SECURITY COMMITTEE'S DECISION OF YESTERDAY MORNING AND ORDER AN IMMEDIATE WITHDRAWAL. THE PALESTINIANS WOULD NOT AGREE TO A CEASEFIRE UNTIL THE WITHDRAWAL TOOK PLACE.

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC NIACT IMMEDIATE 8399

AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT NIACT IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS NIACT IMMEDIATE

S E C R E T SECTION 2 OF 2 TEL AVIV 7195

EXDIS TREAT AS NODIS

WHITE HOUSE FOR DR. BRZEZINSKI ONLY

5. BEGIN SAID HE WAS NOT SURE HE HAD AUTHORITY TO OVER-
RIDE A DECISION BY A CABINET COMMITTEE AND THAT HE MUST
CONSULT HIS COLLEAGUES, WHICH HE COULD NOT DO
UNTIL TOMORROW. HE THEN TURNED TO THE QUESTION I HAD
RAISED OF PROVOCATION AND FROM THAT TO THE QUESTION OF
A POSSIBLE VIOLATION BY ISRAEL OF ITS AGREEMENT WITH US
ON U.S.-SUPPLIED ARMS. HE SAID CATEGORICALLY THAT NO
ISRAELI SOLDIERS PARTICIPATED IN THE RECENT CHRISTIAN
MILITARY ACTION ALTHOUGH THOSE ACTIONS WERE SUPPORTED
BY ISRAELI ARTILLERY. IF ISRAELI FORCES LEAVE, HOW-
EVER, A PLO COUNTERATTACK WOULD PROBABLY BE SUCCESSFUL
BECAUSE PLO REINFORCEMENTS HAVE ARRIVED IN THE AREA
FROM THE NORTH. FOR THIS REASON, ISRAEL CANNOT LEAVE
WITHOUT A CEASEFIRE BEING IN EFFECT.

6. THE PRIME MINISTER SAID HE WAS DEEPLY DISTURBED BY
THE REFERENCE IN THE PRESIDENT'S LETTER TO A POSSIBLE
VILATION BY THE RECENT ACTION. IF ISRAEL HAD ATTACKED

ITS NEIGHBORS, SUCH LANGUAGE WOULD BE JUSTIFIED. THIS
WAS NOT THE CASE; NO ISRAELI FORCES HAD BEEN INVOLVED
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IN OFFENSIVE ACTIVITIES AND ALL ISRAELI MOVES HAD BEEN IN
DEFENSE OF THE CHRISTIANS. THE ISRAELI VIEW IS THAT NO
ATTACK HAD BEEN CARRIED OUT AND THUS NO VIOLATION OF
OUR AGREEMENT HAS OCCURRED.

7. I REPLIED THAT THE LONGER ISRAELI FORCES ARE IN
LEBANON, THE MORE DIFFICULT IT BECOMES FOR THE PRESIDENT
TO HANDLE THIS POINT, ON WHICH HE IS BOUND BY VERY
SPECIFIC LEGISLATION. ON THE BASIS OF SUBSTANTIAL
EVIDENCE IT IS OUR JUDGMENT THAT ISRAELI FORCES WERE A
PARTY TO AN ATTACK OUTSIDE ISRAELI BORDERS. THE ISRAELI
FORCE INVOLVED IN LEBANON HAS BEEN MUCH LARGER AND THE
SUPPORT OF THE CHRISTIANS HAS BEEN SUBSTANTIALLY GREATER
IN RECENT DAYS THAN IN ANY PAST ACTION. THE
DEGREE OF ISRAELI INVOLVEMENT IN WHAT UNEQUIVOCALLY IS
AN OFFENSIVE ACTION IS SO GREAT THAT WE CAN NO LONGER
LOOK THE OTHER WAY. THE IMPLICATIONS OF ISRAELI ACTIONS
DURING THE PAST WEEK HELD GRAVE CONSEQUENCES FOR OUR
RELATIONS.

8. SUMMING UP, I SAID SEVERAL PROBLEMS ARE INTER-
RELATED: WORKING OUT THE TIMING OF A CEASEFIRE,
ASSURING THE CESSATION OF ROCKET ATTACKS AND OTHER
PALESTINIAN ACTS WHICH MIGHT BE CARRIED OUT IN
RETALIATION, AND THE COMPLICATIONS SUCH ACTIONS BY
BOTH SIDES WOULD HAVE FOR THE IMPLICATION OF THE
SHTAURA ACCORD. I SAID WE WERE NOT ASKING THE ISRAELIS
TO AGREE TO THE ACCORD, BUT ONLY TO GIVE THE LEBANESE
A CHANCE TO IMPLEMENT IT AND THUS PROVIDE SOME STABILITY
TO THE AREA THROUGH THE WITHDRAWAL OF THE BULK OF THE
PALESTINIAN FORCES AND THEIR WEAPONS. THE MINISTER OF
DEFENSE HAD FORCEFULLY EXPLAINED TO ME THE ISRAELI MORAL
COMMITMENT TO THE CHRISTIANS AND TO THE THIRTY CHRISTIAN
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MILITIAMEN HOLDING THE HILL. BUT I SAID THAT IN MY
JUDGMENT THE PRIME MINISTER AS A STATESMAN MUST BALANCE
THAT COMMITMENT ALONG WITH ALL THE OTHER CONSIDERATIONS
I HAD CITED AND DECIDE WHETHER THEIR PRESENCE ON A
SINGLE HILLTOP WAS WORTH RISKING THE LONG RANGE
STABILITY OF LEBANON. I ADMIRE ISRAEL'S SENSE OF
MORAL COMMITMENT TO THESE MEN. SINCE IT WAS SO GREAT,

AND SINCE HE WAS SO CONCERNED ABOUT THEIR SAFETY AFTER AN ISRAELI WITHDRAWAL, THEN HE MUST SERIOUSLY CONSIDER ORDERING THEIR WITHDRAWAL AT THE SAME TIME. IN ANY CASE, I REMINDED HIM, TEL SHARIFA AND MOST OF THE REST OF THE TERRITORY INVOLVED IN THE PAST WEEK'S HOSTILITIES WOULD REVERT TO THE CHRISTIANS IF THE SHTAURA ACCORD WAS IMPLEMENTED.

9. BEGIN GOT UP AND WENT OVER AND POURED US WHISKEY AND, RAISING HIS GLASS, SAID HE WOULD DO THE FOLLOWING: HE WOULD CONVENE THE SECURITY COMMITTEE AT 1900 HOURS TONIGHT. IN THE MEANTIME, HE ASKED ME TO SEND HIS INTERIM RESPONSE TO THE PRESIDENT: ISRAEL AGREES TO WITHDRAW ITS FORCES FROM LEBANON. THE MEETING TONIGHT WILL CONSIDER THE QUESTION OF THE TIMING OF THAT WITHDRAWAL AND WEIZMAN WILL TELEPHONE ME WITH THE RESULTS OF THE COMMITTEE'S MEETING, PROBABLY ABOUT 2000 HOURS LOCAL. HE SAID HE WOULD DO HIS BEST TO EXPEDITE THE DECISION SINCE HE UNDERSTOOD THE URGENCY OF THE SITUATION. I ASKED THAT HE RECONFIRM TO ME THAT ISRAEL WILL DO ALL IN ITS POWER TO ENSURE THAT THE CHRISTIAN FORCES ALSO OBSERVE THE CEASEFIRE. HE GAVE HIS ASSURANCES. IN TURN HE ASKED THAT I IMMEDIATELY CONVEY TO HIM OR WEIZMAN ANY INFORMATION WE MAY RECEIVE DURING THE COURSE OF THE DAY ON THE STATUS OF LEBANESE AND/OR SYRIAN CONSULTATIONS WITH THE PALESTINIANS CONCERNING THE CEASEFIRE. HE SAID THIS WOULD BE HELPFUL TO HIM IN PERSUADING HIS CABINET COLLEAGUES TONIGHT OF THE NEED FOR AN IMMEDIATE ISRAELI WITHDRAWAL.

10. COMMENT: I SENSE THAT ONLY ABOUT HALF WAY THROUGH
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OUR CONVERSATION DID THE FULL IMPORT OF THE PRESIDENT'S LETTER BEGIN TO SINK IN. I LEFT A VERY SOBER PRIME MINISTER WHO IS CLEARLY DISTURBED OVER THE IMPLICATIONS FOR U.S.-ISRAELI RELATIONS OF EVENTS OF THE PAST WEEK. CONSEQUENTLY I AM OPTIMISTIC THAT WE ARE WITHIN HOURS OF A GOI DECISION LEADING TO A UNILATERAL ISRAELI WITHDRAWAL.
VIETS

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